

Well, in light of what we've just heard, it's very tempting to focus on the obvious absurdities of a world-view that has its roots in the middle ages, a time when many people of course believed that earth was at least very much smaller than it is now, if not actually flat. Let's not forget that it's not all that long ago really, in terms of history, that people were burned, made into human torches, for attacking the ideas of the pope. But I'm not going to get into whipping a dead horse here. Instead I'm going to try to steer the debate back on its proper subject, which is the legalization of euthanasia.

We are debating legalizing euthanasia, a matter of life and death, and logic alone will not suffice. We need a way to differentiate between good and evil: an ethical compass. In order to use the compass correctly, we need some idea where we're going. What's our destination? What is the purpose of life? Frank Herbert has provided a useful definition which I'll quote:

[The aim of life] is simple: to maintain and produce coordinated patterns of greater and greater diversity. Life improves the closed system's capacity to sustain life. Life--all life--is in the service of life. Necessary nutrients are made available to life **by** life in greater and greater richness as the diversity of life increases. The entire landscape comes alive, filled with relationships and relationships within relationships.

Now that we know where we're going, we can use our ethical compass. That which increases biological diversity is good. That which reduces biological diversity is evil. This is a true pro-life position.

The word euthanasia originally meant painless death. It has many meanings now, but I'm only going to address the relatively simple case of assisted suicide: people who want to die, and people who are willing to help them die. The question is, does granting individuals the right to assisted suicide have a positive or negative effect on biological diversity? I'm going to present three arguments that it has a positive effect.

The first argument says that we should legalize euthanasia because doing so weakens the relevance of religious institutions. Why is this positive? Because religious institutions tend to discourage biodiversity by asserting both the absolute sanctity of human life, and the absolute inferiority of non-human life. I'll provide some evidence for that shortly.

The second argument says that we should legalize euthanasia, and abortion as well, because granting these rights helps establish that the value of human life is not absolute, but relative.

The third argument says that we should legalize euthanasia because the more individual rights we grant, the more likely it becomes that we'll also grant rights to non-humans. If, for example, we

grant rights to animals, as we've already begun to do, it's not inconceivable that we could grant rights to more abstract entities such as trees, rivers, mountains or even biological diversity.

1st neg: Geological science has proven that by catastrophes, new life forms evolve. So as the human race is heading for catastrophe, we are giving way to new development, making room for the last four billion years of world history.

RCK: It can certainly be argued that the catastrophic effects we're having on the geological and biological systems of the earth will in fact make room for some new type of development, however some may argue that this is not the most compassionate solution to our problems. The Church of Euthanasia's position is that we should have compassion for all living things, even for humans. The laws of nature clearly state that while all species have the right to compete, no species has the right to destroy its competition utterly.

1st neg: But that is a human-centered view.

RCK: I don't think so. I think it's a life-centered view. I'm arguing that the purpose of life is to permit evolution to continue, to permit the greater and greater diversity of life, and thus far, unless you have a counter-example, the only species I'm aware of that has directly opposed itself to the process of evolution is the human species.

If I may just provide some examples for the first argument, which I think is very important. In the first argument, I'm stating that religious institutions assert the absolute value of human life and the absolute inferiority of non-human life, and I have exhibit A here from the good book, this is from Genesis 1:28, "God blessed [humans] and said to them: "be fruitful and become many..."--well we've certainly done that--"and fill the earth and subdue it,"--I think the earth is fairly well subdued at this point--"and have in subjection... every living creature..." Here's another quote which I think is even more relevant, 1st John 2:15 "Do not love either the world or the things of this world. If anyone loves the world, the love of God is not in him." In effect, the Church has traditionally argued that those who love the world more than they love God, or more than they love the afterlife, are speaking for the Antichrist, and I guess that makes me the Antichrist.

Modern man equates civilization with the ability to manipulate his environment to suit his needs. Today, I am arguing for a less anthropocentric world-view in which biological diversity is the ultimate value.

2nd neg: Is it true or is it not that you and your organization run a suicide help-line whereby... vulnerable people call the organization and they are put on a track towards suicide, when they are at their most vulnerable, and thinking that they have no

value and no place in this world. If that's true sir I think you should sit down. [applause]

RCK: The truth of the matter is that no-one has yet to kill themselves on behalf of the Church of Euthanasia.

2nd neg: The point that we're making is that's not relevant because you encourage it...

RCK: Actually it is relevant, because it's not due to any lack of effort on our part. [laughter] We have indeed encouraged people to make examples of themselves, however that has not taken place.

There have been people who have threatened to kill themselves, but they haven't done it. The point is that the Church of Euthanasia does not exist in an ideological vacuum. In fact we live in a greatly changed world: this is not the middle ages. In today's world, man has caused geological-scale damage to his environment. We now have holes in the atmosphere, massive species extinction, undrinkable water, and a host of other serious side-effects of the industrial age. In this ideological climate, it becomes necessary to question the supposedly absolute value of human life. The Church of Euthanasia uses many propagandistic devices to draw attention to the fact that the sheer ubiquity of the human species is now having a negative effect on the planet.

3rd neg: And you believe, honestly, that one of the better ways of going about this is to prey on those who are already down, and run a suicide help-line, where you trick people into ringing the help-line thinking they're going to get some help, and actually make them kill themselves. Do you believe that that is honestly the best way to deal with overpopulation in the world?

RCK: I think there are a lot of ways to deal with overpopulation in the world, but I think that so far most of them have been INEFFECTIVE. [laughter, applause]

3rd neg: Why don't you lead by example?

That's the most commonly asked question, and the answer is I just might. Don't think I haven't thought about it. But the question indicates a misunderstanding of my position. What does my slogan for example, "Save The Planet--Kill Yourself," really mean? The point is not that I'm going to kill myself, or that anyone else has to kill themselves, the point is that we are creating a space for people to feel some sense of shame at what most people regard as the great accomplishments of the human species: the complete subjugation of the earth and the destruction of vast portions of its ecosystems. Our members have some sense of responsibility, some personal sense of shame, and even a sense of suicidal rage. The Church of Euthanasia gives them space to feel that rage, and transmute it into positive action, such as speaking to you here today on this subject.

1st neg: Do you feel that the policy of the People's Democratic

Republic of China, of one child per family, is perfect, and do you fund this government?

RCK: I wish we had that much money. Actually we're in no position to fund anyone. I would say that it's much more serious than that. Every member of the Church of Euthanasia in fact takes a lifetime vow to never have children: that is what constitutes membership in the Church of Euthanasia, nothing more or less than the observance of our commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Procreate." In that sense we have a demonstration effect. We are making examples out of ourselves: that it is possible, even righteous and laudable for people to go through their entire lives without having children. Even if everyone had only one child for a hundred years, that still this would not be enough to prevent further destruction of our ecosystems, because of the distribution of population. It goes without saying that for people to limit themselves even only to two children in the United States, is like a couple in the West Indies limiting themselves to sixty children just in terms of energy consumption.

1st neg: No problem with that. But that's all on a free basis, of personal choice. But my question was...

RCK: Do we encourage coercive population reduction policies? No, we do not. We are only supporting voluntary forms of population reduction, of which euthanasia is one. Any more questions?

4th neg: What's the deal with cannibalism? [applause]

RCK: I should point out that the Pope actually has the jump on us there: Catholicism includes explicit cannibalism with the drinking of blood and the eating the body of Christ [laughter] but the larger point here is that in an era where the human population is just short of six billion, and in which we add a quarter of a million humans to the population every day, net increase, I think it is nothing short of criminal for humans to devolve the vast proportion of their diet from the higher mammals, given the strain that this places on our already overburdened ecosystems, and not even taking into the moral questions raised by our herding animals into the concentration camps that are commonly known as factory farms. So that's what cannibalism is about: you don't have to eat human flesh if you don't want to.

1st neg: If that is so, why did you fund your own church, instead of joining the ancient Indian sect of the Jains, who will not harm any life, and whose traditional death is to starve themselves?

RCK: Well, I think some means are more effective than others. I've done what I thought was effective, what would reach the largest number of people, and promote new ideas, different ideas, that people hadn't been exposed to before. In that sense the Church of Euthanasia's purpose is fundamentally educational. [applause]

Individual rights are the hallmark of an egalitarian society, and they don't grow on trees. Individual rights have to be fought for, and they are granted at the expense of institutions that benefit from the status quo. When Americans drafted their constitution and bill of rights, that didn't give them any rights at all. They were then obliged to fight for those rights, and win them from the institution that benefitted from the status quo, namely, the British empire. Slaves weren't given their freedom, they had to fight for it, over a long period of time. The right to vote, civil rights, women's rights, it's the same story. Why should the right to die be any different? The institutions that benefit from the status quo in this case are religious. Organized religions make it their business to impose dogmatic systems of moral judgement on individuals. If people start deciding for themselves how to live and how to die, pretty soon organized religions are going to find themselves out of business. It shouldn't be any great shock that the Catholic Church actively opposes abortion and euthanasia. The Church is fighting to maintain its power, and frankly, it's losing. People are gradually winning the right to make their own moral judgements about personal matters of life and death.

We're debating the wrong proposition here. The question isn't whether euthanasia should be legalized, the question is whether individuals are going to be granted the right to commit suicide. Once that right is established, the rest is just arguments about how to implement the right fairly, punish abuses, and so forth. We go through this process with every new right. It doesn't make sense to grant women the right to have an abortion unless we also ensure the means to implement abortion. We need doctors willing to perform the abortions, abortion clinics and related equipment, money to pay the doctors and buy the equipment. If these conditions aren't met, there's no point in granting the right.

In the case of euthanasia, we clearly have people who want to die, and doctors willing to help them die. What we don't have is the right to commit suicide, because powerful religious institutions such as the Catholic Church correctly perceive that granting this right will further erode their relevance in a rapidly changing world. That is why they spend vast sums of money lobbying governments and individuals against granting this right. In short, we don't have the right to commit suicide because we haven't managed to win it yet. We may not have God on our side, but we definitely do have reason and history on our side. My advice is keep fighting.

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Historically, individual rights are won at the expense of institutions that benefit from the status quo. In the case of euthanasia, the institutions that benefit from the status quo are religious. Religious institutions make it their business to impose dogmatic systems of moral judgement on individuals. If individuals make their own moral judgements, and decide for themselves how to live and how to die, religious institutions lose relevance.

The first and second arguments rest on the fact that religious institutions generally discourage biodiversity by asserting both the absolute sanctity of human life, and the absolute inferiority of non-human life.

The first argument says that we should legalize euthanasia purely because it weakens the relevance of the Church.

The second argument says that we should legalize euthanasia, and abortion as well, because granting these rights helps establish that the value of human life is not absolute, but relative.

The third argument says that we should legalize euthanasia because the more individual rights we grant, the more likely it becomes that we'll also grant rights to non-humans.

Modern man equates civilization with the ability to manipulate his

environment to suit himself. I argue for a less anthropocentric world-view in which biological diversity is the ultimate value.

Our lives are lived in flamboyant denial of our fundamental biologic equivalence to all other animals and it is only in death that we embrace our natural place in the global ecosystem.

--Diane Karluk, M.D.

Euthanasia. Abortion. Contraception. Sex-education. What do they all have in common? They are all opposed by the Catholic Church. Why? Because they are inescapable reminders of man's biological nature. The central tenet of Catholicism is denial of the body. The body sins, and must be whipped. The body gets dirty, smells, eats, excretes, has sexual urges, gets sick, dies, and rots. The soul, on the other hand, providing it doesn't cause trouble, gets to go somewhere clean and live forever.

We are tool-wielding apes. I know this comes as a shock, but the scientific evidence is overwhelming. Like our fellow creatures, we experience pleasure and pain, birth and death. You can't have one without the other. Catholicism is an obvious refusal to accept the terms of biological existence here on Earth. Historically, it's understandable. If you were a serf, illiterate, starving, covered with shit, watching your family die of the Black Plague, you'd want to believe in a comfortable afterlife too. You probably wouldn't enjoy your body much. Who could blame you for whipping it? Can we blame the Catholic Church for exploiting fear and ignorance to create a vast empire complete with inquisitions, witch burnings and crusades? Yes, but that's another story.

God said the world was created in seven days. Well, there's a certain amount of widely accepted geological evidence to contradict that. Copernicus was accused of heresy for suggesting that the Earth might not be the center of the universe. I don't know what kind of astronomy they teach here, but I'll bet most of you accept that the earth travels around the sun. What does that mean? It means that you're capable of thinking for yourself. You don't need a bunch of pedophiles in black robes telling you what to think and how to live your life.

According to the Bible, the Antichrist will encourage people to love this world, the world of flesh and blood, more than the afterlife. I guess that makes me the Antichrist. The Bible also says that the Earth was made for us, and that people are destined to conquer it and rule over it. We've done a fine job of conquering the Earth. It's bleeding to death at our feet. Strip malls. Concrete and asphalt everywhere. Contaminated water. Holes in the atmosphere. Species extinction. Who cares? We're going to heaven.

The Earth's human population is just under six billion. The net increase in human numbers is a million every four days, a quarter-million a day. Ninety-five million additional humans every year, and meanwhile a third of the people on Earth go to bed hungry. Could this have anything to do with Catholicism? With having huge

families? Of course it does! You've got a state religion that discourages contraception and sex-education, and outlaws euthanasia and abortion. You can't even get a divorce. Is this the way you want to live? If not, it's up to you to do something about it. The Holy Roman empire had a big army. Folks who complained became human torches. Today the Pope's just another guy in a dress. There's no excuse.

There has been social progress. It's too slow, and it's not enough, but it's still progress. We used to chain blacks to boats. That's not allowed anymore. Women used to be chattel, the absolute property of their husbands. Nowadays, most women can pick their mates, have careers, own property, vote in elections. We take these things for granted, but they were tremendous battles. In some places (not Ireland) women even have the right to control life and death within their bodies. Who could have predicted that? Amazing social progress.

Until very recently, if you were homosexual, you lived your entire life in fear of being discovered. To this day, people are murdered just for being homosexual. Sexual civil rights are the current frontier of social progress. Someday, people will look back at this time and say, "People were primitive then. They tried to punish homosexuals. How tragic."

Slowly but surely, human societies are learning to value individual rights. Individual rights don't restrict the rights of others. If I choose to die, that doesn't restrict anyone's freedom. People should have the right to self-expression. People shouldn't be discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, or sexual preference. People should be able to enjoy their bodies without having children, and they should be given the tools to make that possible: sex-education, contraception, and abortion.

The next frontier of social progress will be euthanasia. It's already starting. People are demanding to be allowed to die the way they choose. And why not? What sane person argues in favor of prolonged misery and painful death? Every human being has the absolute right to choose the time, place, and manner of their death. Let's worry less about the people who don't want to be here, and more about keeping the planet habitable for those of us who do.

1. God blessed [humans] and said to them: "be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it, and have in subjection... every living creature... Genesis 1:28

2. Do not love either the world or the things of this world. If anyone loves the world, the love of God is not in him. 1st John 2:15